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FRIENDLY OBSERVATIONS
ADDRESSED TO THE
MANUFACTURING POPULATION
OF
GREAT BRITAIN,

NOW SUFFERING
UNDER THE DIFFICULTIES OF THE TIMES.

BY
THE REV. THOMAS GISBORNE, M.A.
PREFENDARY OF DURHAM.

THIRD EDITION.

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FRIENDLY
OBSERVATIONS.

IN assuring you, my Countrymen and Friends, that I feel sincere concern for your late and present situation, I may justly hope to be credited by you ; as the same feeling for you has been most extensively declared and effectively confirmed by all classes of persons in these kingdoms. Your privations have been too conspicuous, your wants too urgent and too general, not to force themselves every where on public notice : and they have excited corresponding sympathy. In the case also of by far the larger portion of your number, the persevering patience, the orderly submission, and the quiet resignation, which you have manifested

under the severe distresses of yourselves and of your families, have been remarked by the nation with the warm approval which they deserved. They have been recognised by the Ministers of State, by the two Houses of the Legislature, and by His Majesty himself: and have strengthened your claims to exertions throughout the whole community for your relief. But from these exertions, to which I shall hereafter have to recur, I must now turn, that I may dispose of a less gratifying part of my subject.

I lament that I am compelled thus publicly to say, (for the facts to which I must allude are such as cannot be passed in silence,) that in these trying exigences all the members of the manufacturing body have not conducted themselves with patience, quietude, and resignation. Very many in some of your lines of occupation have implicated themselves in proceedings the most outrageous, in destroying the pro-

perty and endangering and assailing the lives of their neighbours, of their masters, nay, I fear that in various instances I might add, of their benefactors. Of such acts of insubordination, violence, and atrocity, it is scarcely possible to speak in language of too strong condemnation. And their folly is equal to their wickedness. They inevitably and irresistibly recoil on the heads of those who perpetrate them. There is no proposition which experience has more clearly demonstrated, no proposition which experience has hung up in more distinct and legible characters before the eyes of every man who will allow himself to look upon it, than this : that, in a well-governed country like Great Britain, no attempt can be more frantic than that of entering into conflict with the law. A mob collected for violence is an assemblage of madmen ; of men mad as to their purposes, mad as to their hopes, mad as to their under-

standings. Like other madmen suddenly broken loose from restraint, they may dash into pieces the furniture, they may demolish the houses, they may take away the lives, of innocent men : but keepers and chains are behind, and will speedily be upon them. The law gathers its force. If its Magistrates and its Officers, and the whole Civil Power, be insufficient for the emergency ; it summons to their aid the military strength of the land,—yes, if necessity requires, even from each extremity of the realm. It is backed by the efforts, or upheld by the wishes, of the great mass of the people, by the good and the wise, by the constituted authorities, by the men of rank, by the men of large property, by the indolent, the quiet, the wary, and the fearful ; by all who, from whatever motive, believe themselves interested in the maintenance of public tranquillity, and in the support of the existing order of things among us.

What can the wild fury of twenty thousand levellers of Factories and breakers of Power-Looms effect against the disciplined valour, the compact onset, of a thousand dragoons, or the platoon-firing of one or two regiments of infantry? The guilty lie stretched in blood on the scene of outrage; or are led away to mourn over their short-lived triumph in prison, in exile, or at the gallows. Nay, if such criminal audacity, if such iniquitous invasion of the rights and the safety of others, should succeed to the full desire of the planners and the executors of the desperate mischief; if it be supposed that justice were so weak and misrule so predominant, that neither could protection be ensured to the endangered; nor retribution to the injured, nor could punishment be inflicted upon the transgressors: — what would still be the consequences? Such as would indelibly fix the broad brand of folly on

the forehead of every rioter who had contributed to produce them. The obnoxious factories are burned down: but they will not be restored. The hated establishments are annihilated: but they will not be replaced by others. Confidence is fled; security is at end; enterprise is no more. The Capitalist will remove with his property to a distant quarter, where he may reap and enjoy the fruits of his industry. In the districts where Riot has won the day, there will thenceforth be thousands of famishing workmen; but there will be no master to employ them. Their misery will be far more deep than that which they made an excuse for their crimes. And they will have forfeited their title to the pity of their country, which, while they remained obedient to the laws, was actively occupying itself in providing them and their wives and their children with food and raiment, and thought no

efforts of benevolence too laborious, no sacrifices to charity too costly.

But folly is yet to be exposed in another of the forms under which it displays itself. These sons of havoc, whose logic, like the polarity of the magnet, usually appears concentrated at the ends of the iron bars and the sledge-hammers with which they prosecute their work of destruction, sometimes aim at a little reasoning in the vulgar way of verbal argument. They declaim against certain recent and very eminent improvements in machinery as ruinous to the operative population, and as necessarily to be abolished. You, my friends, the peaceable and reflecting workmen, know that every improvement in machinery, even if for a short time some inconvenience should result to a part of your body from its introduction, tends ultimately to the benefit of the manufacturing population; and on that ac-

count, as well as on other grounds, is deserving of encouragement. The principal circumstance on which the sale of British Manufactures, and consequently the employment of the population which fabricates them, depends, must ever be their superiority in excellence and in cheapness. How has superiority in either point been attained, how is it yet to be preserved, but by continual improvements in mechanism? While the enemies of power-looms are loudly demanding alterations in the Corn Laws as indispensable to enable the British manufacturer to compete in cheapness with his rivals on the Continent; at the same moment they would extinguish improvements, the loss of which would rapidly and permanently enhance the price of British articles much more than any change in the Corn Laws can reduce it. And how is Great Britain to face her commercial antagonists in the foreign

market, if, while they are eagerly embracing every improvement, she is to abominate and to abjure it? Is it thus that her articles will become more excellent, more cheap? But these deluded men, whom you and I would gladly bring to rational views and rational conduct, are not hostile to all machinery. On the contrary, it is in the use of machinery which has been somewhat longer adopted that they have constantly been labouring. Let them tell us then by what arguments they would defend the original introduction and the present continuance of that machinery against a more rustic set of their brethren, who should require its abolition. Let them be consistent also in their principles. Every improvement, every kind of machinery was new in its day; and might at first be incommodious to the interests of persons who were in the habit of bungling at the same work without it. Why

ought not all machinery to be abolished? Why ought not waggons and carts, that pernicious dead stock of machinery, to be broken up for fuel; and that equally mischievous piece of living mechanism, the pack-horse, to be sent adrift to roam upon the mountains; and employment to be secured to the British people by re-establishing the good simple primeval custom, that every man should transport to every quarter of the island his own commodities on his own shoulders?

Surely on these points enough has now been said. Consider, then, my friends, how diversified are the methods in which the kind compassion of your countrymen has put forth its energies, and is still putting them forth, to mitigate, and, if it may be practicable, to terminate your sufferings. You have seen, you still see, private persons of all ranks, from the peer to the humblest tradesman, flocking in on every side to the chief points of

distress with their contributions. You have seen, you still see, local Committees anxiously sitting day by day, and week after week, to consult in what manner the benefactions may be most efficaciously applied for your advantage, and to arrange and to superintend the distribution. The amount of all these private donations in all the towns and counties where the pressure subsists, it is impossible to calculate ; but I apprehend that it is abundantly greater than you are likely to suppose it to be. The sum also which has already been paid for your support in the shape of Poor's Rates is such as, if collectively declared to you, would impress you with astonishment. Then you learn from the newspapers the noble height which public subscriptions for your relief have reached. Your King also has shown by his munificence the fatherly interest which he takes in your condition. And he has

now directed that your cause be pleaded from the pulpit, and a collection be made for you by the Clergy, in every Church in the kingdom. You cannot be surprised that even all the exertions which have been so steadily prosecuted have not been capable of meeting the full amount of your necessities. But well may you rest convinced, that in those exertions, and in the additional measure which is about to take place, you have a pledge that your Governors and your Country bear you, and will bear you, habitually in their thoughts. I may trust that at such an hour you will be disposed to listen to friendly counsel.

There is a truth remaining to be told, a truth of most serious moment in its bearings both retrospective and prospective; a truth highly disgraceful, and one therefore which will be utterly unwelcome, to those on whom it attaches; a truth applicable, as I cannot but fear,

to a very large proportion of the working manufacturers of Great Britain, although there are, in all parts, I doubt not, numbers of an opposite description whom it is obviously impossible for me to designate or to know. All therefore which it is within the power of myself or of any writer to do, is to state the matter in question, undisguisedly, and to charge on the conscience of every man the obligation of solemnly examining himself upon it as before God. *The late and present distress of the manufacturing population of Great Britain must be deemed, in the case of multitudes, in a very considerable degree, attributable to themselves.* True as this proposition, on other grounds than those which are now in my contemplation, may be as to many of the proprietors of manufactories; it is not of masters that I am speaking. It is of the operatives that I feel bound to testify, that *their late and present distress must be deemed, in a very*

considerable degree, attributable to themselves.

How? Could they have arrested or turned aside the course of events? No. But they might have prepared themselves to meet it.

If my line of life has not been one which has admitted of personal connection with manufacturing concerns, and if my abode has not been in the heart of a manufacturing district; I have generally resided so near to the confines of extensive and populous tracts replete with manufacturing towns and establishments, and have been led, in common with other persons amidst similar opportunities and of ordinary observation and enquiry, to know so much of the habits of working manufacturers in different parts of the Island, as to have no doubt on my mind respecting the truth which I have stated. I have brought it forward with the view of offering some *practical reflections* upon it; and in the

hope that, under the blessing of God, some little benefit may result from them.

Trusting, then, to your remembrance, that if, to avoid tedious circumlocution and repetition, I may occasionally be found to employ general terms, it will be with complete recollection and allowance, on my part, of the very numerous exceptions which I already have admitted; I must aver that, in prosperous times of trade, the habits of the operatives are very commonly deserving of the severest reprehension. They are marked by idleness, selfishness, extravagance, and brutish intemperance. A man who by regularly working on the six days of the week, and merely during the wonted hours of labour on each day, might gain double or treble, perhaps quadruple, of the sum requisite for the comfortable maintenance of himself and his family through the week, will pertinaciously refuse to work more than two days &c

three ; and devotes the remaining days, the Sabbath included, to wicked companions, luxurious indulgence, and beastly sensuality at a public-house. He thinks not, or he thinks with hardened contempt, of the duty of labouring with ordinary diligence, or rather with augmented assiduity, during such lucrative seasons ; and of carefully laying up the superfluity of his earnings in reserve against times of domestic sickness or of commercial depression. He *careth for none of these things*. Then comes the period of distress. Through his own determined sinfulness, it finds him totally unprovided. At once he shamelessly throws himself and his household a burthen on the parish for legal support ; and, if the difficulties of trade be continued, on his country for unmerited charity.

You may have been accustomed to suspect that the laws of the land, being enacted by the wealthier part of the com-

munity, may probably have a bearing, in cases in which the respective interests of the poor and of the rich are to be adjusted together, in favour of the latter class. In the case the most important to the poor, that of the Poor Laws, I can make it evident to you, that the fact is decidedly and greatly the reverse. That so far as the industrious and upright poor are concerned, it is greatly the reverse, I rejoice. But, unhappily for all descriptions of persons, it is equally the reverse as to the idle also and the dissolute. On what principle ought laws respecting the relief of the poor by the men of property to be constructed? Ought it not to be on the principle of equity between the two parties? Assuredly. And what would the principle of equity between the two parties dictate? That we may understand this subject the more clearly, let us suppose ourselves to be listening to a poor man

and to a man of property, each of them a fair and an intelligent man, each of them acting as the representative of the class to which he belongs, discussing it.

—— (*Poor Man.*) “As you possess an
“ampler portion of the goods of this
“world than I do, it will be right that,
“if I should be unable by all reasonable
“efforts to maintain myself and my
“family, you should contribute to my aid,
“according to your reasonable ability.”

—— (*Man of Property.*) “Undoubtedly
“it will be right. But it is also right
“that, you should use all reasonable
“efforts to maintain yourself and your
“family, and not throw a needless weight
“upon me.” —— (*Poor Man.*) “Un-

“deniably.” —— (*Man of Property.*)
“And the making of reasonable efforts
“must include care on your part, when
“at any time you gain more than is
“necessary for your fair present oc-
“casions, duly to lay up a portion as a

“ fund for your future exigences. Other-
 “ wise, when they arrive, you will throw
 “ a needless weight upon me.”——(*Poor*
Man.) “ Indisputably. But, perhaps,
 “ when unavoidable distress comes upon
 “ me, you may not be willing to give
 “ me proper aid. I think, therefore, that
 “ you should agree to be bound by law
 “ to do so.”——(*Man of Property.*)
 “ I agree to be bound by law. Perhaps
 “ also you may not be willing, when
 “ able, gradually to lay up a fund for
 “ your future exigences. In equity you
 “ ought to be equally bound so to do.”
 ——(*Poor Man.*) “ It is equitable ; and
 “ I am ready to be bound.”

So speaks the upright poor man : but
 so speaks not the law. The man of pro-
 perty it binds : the poor man it leaves
 unbound ; leaves to the feelings or the
 no-feelings of his own conscience. Thus
 you discern that there is no reciprocity,
 no alternation of equity, attempted in the

arrangement as between the two parties, the receivers and the payers of poor's rates. The receivers are under no legal tie to provide against avoidable need of them : the payers are under legal constraint to pay them when needed, whether the need be unavoidable on the part of the receiver, or has been caused by obstinate idleness, prodigality, and intemperance. But the absence of equity in this arrangement towards the payers of poor's rates is not the circumstance solely or chiefly to be lamented. The greatest evil is the effect produced upon the Poor. The idle and the industrious, the frugal and the extravagant, the moral and the dissolute, are placed on equal ground as to their legal demand for parochial relief when in need : and thus one influential stimulus to good conduct is obliterated. I am well aware that to endeavour wholly to remove or completely to remedy by additional enactments of law the existing inequalities

and evils which I have explained would be a hopeless task ; and materially to lessen them a difficult undertaking, though one as to the success of which, in the hands of a wise Statesman, it would be premature, and, I trust, unreasonable, to despond. You will admit, however, that in the laws, as they now stand, the advantage is unequivocally on the side not of the people of property, but of the poorer classes ; and, unfortunately, as much in favour of the undeserving poor as of the deserving.

But let me earnestly press upon each of you individually to remember, that moral and religious obligations do not depend on the circumstance of their being enforced or not enforced by the penalties of human laws. These obligations rest on the authority of God, on the commands of the Gospel. If it be, as indisputably it is, a part of the moral and religious duty of every one of you before God,

to lay up a reasonable portion of his earnings in prosperous times as a store from which he may draw support in the day of adversity for himself and his household, and thus may be free from the sin of burthening others, through the poor's rates or in any other way, for the help which he might have provided by his own exertions, frugality, and foresight ; every one of you is, and always will be, under an awful obligation in the sight of your future Judge regularly and faithfully to perform this duty, although the law of the land should not visit the neglect of it.

It is as though it were to preclude every imaginable excuse, and to chase away every possible difficulty, which might be alleged as a pretext for disregarding this duty, that the admirable Institution of Saving Banks has arisen. Founded on the pledged engagement of national faith ; stable as the political existence of the country ; ready to re-

ceive any superfluity of your earnings, even if it fall short of twenty shillings at a time ; to place your money in full security in the Public Funds ; to return the whole or any part, if not very considerable in amount, instantly on your demand, or, if large, on very short notice ; and in the mean time to pay to you a half-yearly interest, at the rate of not less than four per cent. annually on your deposits : the Saving Bank is always at hand with its doors open to welcome your approach, and to take under its protection the slender beginnings and every successive increase of your store.

The main requisite that is needed to produce among the manufacturing population a growing attention to the duty upon which I have been dwelling, and progressive improvement in every branch of right conduct, is a more copious infusion and a more heartfelt influence of Christian principle among them. Permit

me, my friends, to advert to a single point,—habitual attendance on divine worship. I allow and lament that such attendance may be merely an outward form joining itself to an unholy life; and therefore, though generally to be regarded as a promising symptom in the case of an individual, is not a criterion of character. But habitual neglect of public worship must be considered in any common instance as a proof that the person has no solicitude respecting his own spiritual state, no active love to our God and Saviour, no anxiety to learn the divine will, and to be enabled to obey it. What then is the general fact as to the attendance of the manufacturing population of Great Britain on public worship? If it be replied, that manufacturers are not more negligent in that respect than the rest of the world: I answer, “It may be so; but that is not the question.” For *the conduct* of others they are not respon-

sible; but they are responsible for their own. Can it be denied that among the British manufacturers, with however numerous exceptions, deplorable negligence prevails? With regard to those of your body in the southern division of the island who profess to belong to that Church of which by deliberate and conscientious preference I am a Member and a Minister, it must in fairness be conceded by me, that in the Churches and Chapels of the English Establishment too long has there been a most serious deficiency of room for the accommodation of the lower classes. Of late years, and at present, much has been done and is doing by the Parliament and by private efforts to diminish the evil. I am, however, persuaded that additional aids, facilities, and encouragements to the erection of Churches must be furnished by the Legislature before the grievance can be removed, and especially under the pres-

sure and with the prospect of a constantly, though variably, augmenting population. I cannot, therefore, but cordially rejoice that numbers of your body so circumstanced, instead of being left in destitution of Christian ordinances, have had, and still possess, the means of attending them in such congregations of our dissenting brethren as differ only in subordinate points of doctrine from our Church. I would rejoice also in the hope that others of you, whose religious opinions prevent them from uniting with us in the services of the Church of England, may have enjoyed ampler opportunities of attendance on public worship in modes satisfactory to their own consciences. The remarks which have been made respecting the situation of the English portion of the manufacturing mass as to accommodation for public worship may be applied, I apprehend, to the situation of *the northern* portion belonging to our

sister Establishment, the Church of Scotland, or to the Scottish Congregations differing from that Church. To Scotland also I trust that all proper assistance will be in every way granted by the Legislature, as her religious necessities may require. Be it your part, whether you dwell to the south or to the north of the Tweed, stedfastly to manifest encreasing solicitude for means of habitual attendance on divine worship, and augmented efforts, to make use of those which you may possess. Then will you speedily behold a corresponding encrease of exertions on every side; exertions in which I trust that the two Established Churches of Great Britain will take the lead, to furnish the accommodations which are requisite.

In concluding this Address, let me entreat you all from this day forward steadily to shun and to discountenance Combinations, whatever form they may

assume, and by whatever speciousness they may be varnished. There was a time when there appeared grounds for a strong persuasion that the Laws then in force on the subject of Combinations did not practically operate with an equal hand on different classes of society. They pressed, in the judgement of many, with unfair weight on the working class. They seemed rigorously to chastise combining workmen, and to leave in comparative impunity combining masters. That partiality of operation in the laws, unintended we must presume, if it existed, is now obviated. All against which complaint could justly be raised I understand to be repealed. Abuse not this improvement. Respect the right of your employers to judge for themselves what wages are the highest which they can afford to give, as carefully as you exercise your own right of judging for *yourselves* what are the lowest wages

for which you can prudently undertake to be employed. Respect the right of your brother-workman to agree to the offered terms, if his opinion as to duty or as to convenience decides him to accept them, as carefully as you exercise your right of declining them. Will you harbour for a moment a thought of insulting him, of hating him, of injuring him, on that account? Tell me, then, how you would regard a master, who should set his face against you, and persecute you, for not accepting the wages which he had offered to you. Or tell me what would be your opinion of a set of masters, who should unite together to insult and to injure another master because he was willing to give you higher wages than those which they had fixed among themselves. Reverence the laws. Love your neighbour as yourself. Strive to be, through that divine grace which will be granted to earnest

prayer, Christians not in name but in reality, — believing, practical Christians. *Strive always to maintain a conscience void of offence both towards God and towards men. Live not to yourselves, not to the corrupt inclinations of human nature, not to the enticements of wicked example, but to the Lord who died for you.* Make reasonable provision in prosperous times against the season of adversity : and if the severity of that season shall overpower your resources, then shall you receive legal relief with the comfort of knowing that you deserve it ; then shall the liberality of your country spring forward to pour forth largely and perseveringly the additional aid to which you will be most justly entitled.

I do not, however, forget the protracted time during which the pressure upon you has continued ; and the situation to which it will necessarily have brought numbers of those who, accord-

ing to their former opportunities of saving, had exercised economical foresight. The slow attrition of a file will at length work its way through a bar of iron. The store reserved against a season of need, if a grain be daily carried off by the current of distress, will be exhausted. Articles of furniture, the fruits of diligence in gainful times, those first which recommended their usefulness by being modestly ornamental to the dwelling, then those of ruder shape and humbler service, have successively disappeared. Every garment with which it was possible to dispense, every portion of bedding not absolutely essential to the preservation of life, has followed. The provident and the improvident stand side by side, equally in want of charitable aid, equally supplicants for it. But though they stand side by side equal in distress, have their feelings *to the present moment* been the same?

No. Are their feelings the same, is their real condition the same, at the present moment? No. Will their feelings be the same, will their condition be the same, from this time forward? No. As to the past and the present I appeal to the experience, as to the future, to the warrantable expectations of the two classes. The satisfaction, the joy, which you, the provident, have felt in reflecting that you have long been supported by your own resources; that you laboured, when the means existed, to lay up those resources; that you have established your characters as industrious and wise men, as men, in numerous instances I would hope, of practical religion, in the eyes of your masters and of the public, and that neither your masters nor the public will forget your conduct: these cheering consolations are unknown to your improvident brethren. *If your care to make provision for ad-*

versity arose merely from worldly prudence, you have found yourselves rewarded. How much more, if it flowed from that *godliness* which has the *promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come!* Then are you assured that your affliction has been a blessing in disguise; and that *all things shall work together for good in the end to them who love God.*

DURHAM, Jan. 13. 1827.

THE END.

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